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## THE AIM AND WORK OF EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS' ASSOCIATIONS

BY MEYER BLOOMFIELD,

Director of the Vocation Bureau of Boston.

The handling of employes is so important a matter that those engaged in it must prepare, and in time will be bound to prepare, as for a profession.

It was in order to bring out the professional ideas involved in this kind of work that those in charge of hiring and supervising employes in a number of Boston establishments were asked to come together four years ago and exchange ideas and experiences. In looking over the then existing associations which might take interest in a program of systematic study of employment management problems, there did not seem to be any which could devote itself in any large degree to such matters. Indeed very few employment managers, or other executives closely related to employing duties, were members of these societies.

There were organizations of credit men, advertising men, accountants, buyers, and many other kinds of trade and business bodies, but never before, so far as the writer is aware, have men in charge of the employing phases of management, the men who pump the life-blood into an establishment, been brought together to consider the nature of the problems their vital work involved.

The fact is, generally speaking, that the employment department has been a much neglected phase of industrial organization, and the person in charge of this kind of work has been rather overlooked in the management scheme.

Several reasons account for this oversight. Employing people and understanding them have not been generally regarded as more than an incident in management. Duties of this nature have been looked upon as unproductive, if not as a necessary evil. In consequence, the men placed in charge of this work were not always the best type procurable nor of the education the work calls for. Notable exceptions in this respect only prove the general rule of practice. Because the department, then, was not seriously considered, and because a petty subordinate was often placed in charge, the heads

of a firm could not think of this aspect of the enterprise as of the same importance with other functions, such as finance, production, and sales. When grave problems of industrial relations presented themselves, the head of the firm or some other important executive would indeed take deep interest in their solution. Experts, lawyers, and others would be consulted. Perhaps a welfare department, in some cases, would be expected to cope with the issues arising. But the department in the very best possible position to know the facts, the needs of the employes, and the methods best calculated to bring about proper relationship and just treatment, the employment department, has rarely been looked to for help, constructive work, and expert knowledge.

This situation is largely responsible for that great waste known as the labor turnover. It is also responsible for much preventable friction and misunderstanding.

A change for the better has come about since the formation of the first employment managers' association in Boston. The change is not, of course, primarily due to this effort. Other causes have been effectively at work. The movement for employment executives' associations is to some extent a result of wiser methods of management, a more enlightened spirit in industry, the vocational spirit in education, the pressure of employes for better understanding of their needs and desires, and numerous investigations into the social aspects of employment. The formation of employment officers' associations have been, however a marked influence in the direction of better management methods and a new energy in the study and treatment of personnel problems.

For nearly four years a new type of association, already referred to, dealing with the problems of hiring and developing employes, has been at work in Boston. During 1911, the Vocation Bureau of Boston invited fifty men, who had in charge the hiring of employes in large shops and stores of the city and vicinity, to come together and consider the advisability of meeting regularly. As a result, the Employment Managers' Association was started.

The aims of this association are described as follows in the constitution:

To discuss problems of employes; their training and their efficiency.

To compare experiences which shall throw light on the failures and successes in conducting the employment department.

To invite experts or other persons who have knowledge of the best methods or experiments for ascertaining the qualifications of employes, and providing for their advancement.

It will be seen that the aim of this new association was to provide a professional medium for the exchange of experiences in a field where little interchange of ideas had taken place; to study the human problem in industry on the basis of fair dealing with the employe. In short, there was a conscious effort to make industrial practice square with the dictates of twentieth century enlightenment. The following programs and outlines give an idea of the society's work:

### EMPLOYMENT MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

#### *Activities Suggested For Year of 1916*

#### COMMITTEE WORK

##### *Group Meetings*

The problems in which the Association is interested will be divided roughly into four groups, as follows: Selection of Employes, Training, Management, Special Work among Employes. A committee will be appointed to consider the phases of each division. Each committee will arrange to meet once a month to discuss the different topics in the main division assigned to it. These meetings will take the form of round table discussions and will be open to any member who wishes to attend. From time to time reports will be submitted to the regular monthly meetings of the Association for fuller discussions.

These round table committee meetings will be held at a mutually convenient time, 5.30 to 7.00 p. m. on Friday at the City Club, is suggested. As there will be four committees this will mean that every Friday there will be held at the City Club one of these round table discussions lasting about one hour and a half and adjourning in ample time to allow participants to keep other engagements, but each committee will only have one meeting a month.

#### SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR COMMITTEE WORK

##### *Selection of Employes*

Sources of Supply; Methods of Securing Applicants; Examinations (general, mental, physical for special positions); Standard Application Blanks; Investigation of Credentials; Relative Value of Qualifications; Choosing between Applicants; Selection of Young or Inexperienced for Training and Promotion; Value of Immigrant Labor; Value of Previous Training and Education; Necessity of Planning for Future in Choosing Employes; Keeping Track of Former Employes; Waiting List; Coöperation with Foreman, Superintendent and Heads of Departments.

##### *Training Employes*

Necessity of Immediate Preliminary Instruction; Instruction in Shop; Special Classes; Company Schools; Outside Education; Part Time Schools; Continuation

of Night Schools; Technical Schools; Need of these in each Industrial and Business Community; Correspondence Schools; Training for Promotion; Coöperation with School Authorities to Secure Proper Preliminary Training; Defects in Present Educational Methods from Employers' Standpoint; Vocational Training, its Value to Employers; Danger to Employees' Health in outside Educational Work.

### *Management*

Advantage of Proper Surroundings and Conditions; Hygiene; Morale; Securing and Retaining Interest; Enthusiasm and Loyalty; Shop Rules; Piece Work; Accident Prevention; Advantages of Employees' Organization; Transfer from One Department to Another; Promotion; Weeding out Undesirables and Inefficient; Cost of Breaking in New Employees; Eliminating Turnover; Cost of Shutdown; Discharge.

### *Special Work Among Employees*

Health; Recreation; Rest Rooms; Thrift; Insurance; Pensions; Credit Unions; Bonus Systems; Profit Sharing; General Advice; Living Conditions; Social Life; Vocational Aid and Advice; Help in Securing a Better or more Suitable Position.

### WEEKLY LETTER

It has been suggested that there be issued at frequent intervals a *Bulletin* in letter form containing in addition to Association notices a *List of positions* open at the plants of the different members and a *Question Box* where members may ask for information in regard to any particular problem or subject.

### GENERAL WORK

The *Monthly Meetings* will be held as usual on the second Tuesday of each month, and the larger problems will be discussed at these, sometimes by outside speakers, but generally by members.

*Visits* to establishments represented by various members are being arranged. There will probably be one of these each month.

As the opportunity permits there will be compiled a general *Index of Information*. Here will be listed (1) Subjects and problems which have been investigated by members individually, their firms or by committees of the Association; (2) Books and monographs on problems of employment management; (3) List of employment bureaus and agencies; (4) A list of educational and training schools available to employees; (5) General information regarding labor legislation.

The Secretary will be glad to be of service to members at any time subject, of course, to the demands of his other work. Office telephone, Fort Hill 1715, resident telephone, Lexington 21-M.

### ABSTRACT OF DISCUSSION AT TWO MEETINGS

#### *Tests*

Our methods, said the employment man of a street railway company, in the selection of motormen has been briefly, personal interview. That is as far as we go in grading the mental traits of men. We are with him five or ten minutes, find out where he works, his age, his education, the different places he has been employed since he left school, what he did, why he left. He is tested in eyesight

—color as well as view—also in weight. He fills out an application blank. The different parties he worked for are referred to. Social references are looked up. And these are compared with his personal statement. By this method you can get an idea as to his standing. If he is accepted, he is placed in charge of an experienced motorman. That man does the testing.

He takes him over the various lines and his tests are practical ones. He is shown how the work is done. He is shown the mechanism of the car and gradually worked up to the full responsibility of handling the car. At first he will take the handles for a short time, where there is little to contend with—where there are no obstructions. Later, he is given the handles for the entire trip. The instructing motorman is right beside him. He will meet all the obstructions and trials that confront a motorman in his daily work. These are the real valuable tests.

When it comes to the last day or two, the motorman actually leaves the front platform altogether, and the man feels he is actually responsible. Then he is down on his own resources. While there is somebody beside him to help him, you have no real test, because he feels that the responsibility rests with somebody else.

The real test would be to have a track—a short line—especially constructed at a nominal expense and have certain obstructions all ready to drop down in front of the man as he goes along. That is a real test, in my opinion a real test. A motorman is going along when suddenly he gets three bells. The conductor may do that to test the motorman, to see how quickly he can stop his car and how he does it.

#### *Discharge*

We may be peculiar in the amount of stability of our organization. Our foremen are as nearly experts as in any industry with which I have come in contact. The average time it takes to reach such a position as that of foreman is from ten to fifteen years. In that period he has instilled in him more or less of the disposition of the management in regard to discharge.

Where foremen come and go quickly this function might be dangerous to place in their hands without any strain. A few figures to show how it works out with us:

In the year 1915 we had 669 cases of absolute discharge during the year. Upwards of 16,000 people are employed; the percentage is not large. Of these 669, 424 have been in the service under three months; 105 more than three and under six months. A total of 529 of the 669 had been employed less than six months; a total of 140 had been employed over two years, less than 1 per cent.

As the term of service increases the number of those discharged decreases. Only 23 who have been in the service from three to five years and only 17 over five years have been discharged, which illustrates the stability of our organization.

In the case of the discharge of a man who does not necessarily leave the employ of the company: Where there are a number of rooms practically the same in character—25 or 27—a man discharged by one overseer might be taken into another department where he will give entirely satisfactory services.

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When the employment department was first organized it was thought unwise to take away from our foremen the right of discharge. It was thought that a

check should be placed on the foremen's action and they were accordingly instructed not to discharge or terminate the services of anyone without notifying the employment department. The employment department interviews every employe who leaves, either voluntarily or discharged for cause.

They feel that sometimes the foreman are hasty and employes are discharged when other means can be used to discipline them and thus save an experienced hand for the company. The employment department was responsible for saving eighty experienced people for the company by transferring them to other departments.

The transferring of the control of discharge from the foreman to the employment department has been very successful. Next year I think the department heads will be instructed to dismiss no one except by the consent of the works manager; he will delegate this to the employment department.

Since the starting of the Boston organization, other cities including New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago have formed similar societies. The present indications are that a country-wide extension of such organizations will take place, because the idea underlying them appears to be fundamental, and in accord with the aims of both industry and social service.

If such extension, then, of employment executives' associations should take place, the time is opportune to consider their purposes, and their possible contribution to good management and right industrial relations. Bearing in mind the fact that the original effort for such type of association came from an institution, the Vocation Bureau, whose chief aim is the promotion of opportunity, the trend in such associations should be along the line of enlightened thinking in modern industrial organization. If their growth remain true to the initial aims, such associations are in a position to help unravel the tangled problems of misemployment, underemployment and unemployment, and the waste of human capacity in general.

When everything that present-day science can suggest in the way of improving technical efficiency in systems of cost-keeping, equipment, machinery and material has been adopted, the biggest of all industrial problems still remains to be faced.

This is the problem of handling men. Every thoughtful employer knows that managing employes, selecting, assigning, directing, supervising and developing them, is the one phase of management which is most difficult and complicated; and it is the one problem in industry which has in the past had least consecutive thought bestowed upon it. Not that employers have been unaware of the

size of this task. Experiment after experiment has been tried with varying results, all of them aiming at the goal of welding the working force into a stable, dependable, and well-assimilated organization. And yet such organization is not common.

Figures as to change in the working force of various establishments are not easy to obtain, but enough are at hand to indicate an enormous leakage of employes each year in the average store, factory, and other places of employment. Many a concern employs each year as many persons as its total payroll. That is, there is a "turnover" of employes amounting to 100 per cent. The figures range from one-third to many times the total number of employes. How many employers have figured out just what it costs in dollars and cents to change an employe? How many have estimated the cost in terms of organization, loyalty, steadiness and *esprit*?

Obviously, an organization cannot be held together with ropes of sand. The coming and going of employes on such a scale as the data available would indicate cannot but prove a disintegrating force, a foe to sound organization, a source of unceasing mischief.

Employers, of course, appreciate more or less clearly what all this means. But few, however, have set themselves to study this problem as it should be studied. Some have with unhappy results expected miracle-workers to solve this problem, and have toyed with strange employment schemes. Some employers have trusted to sleight-of-hand performances in hiring men instead of dealing with their big problem in the way they deal with other knotty problems. If to psychology they must turn, a psychologist and educator like Prof. E. L. Thorndike of Columbia, for example, could have shown them that the application of science to the problem of handling men involved long and painstaking, not to say exceedingly laborious, investigation. There is no royal road to solving the man-problem in industry. But there are ways, intelligent, common-sense and practically understandable ways, of setting to work. There are certain principles to be observed, methods to be adopted and standards to be maintained in dealing with the question of personnel, and adhering to these can alone insure a reasonable degree of success. In any event the waste and friction now involved in the average treatment of the hiring problem can be materially reduced.



In the first place, the proposition must be firmly grasped that handling employes is a serious business. Not everybody can or should hire; not everybody can supervise men. But it is to the employment department of the establishment that we must look for a solution; to its powers, duties, functions and place in the scheme of organization. And above everything else we must look to the character, training, equipment and place of the man who does the hiring.

It is at this point that thought can be most profitably bestowed. A new conception is needed of the functions of the employment department, and the qualifications of the employment superintendent. Not every concern has a special employment department, although the large establishments are giving up the system of hiring by department heads, and concentrating the selection of employes into a separate division. More and more the need is recognized of functionalizing the hiring and handling of men. Without such specialized treatment of this problem it is impossible to give the matter the attention which it requires. Moreover, the power to hire and discharge extended to a number of individuals has given rise to abuses and frictions which have cost the employer dearly. Nothing is more fatal to sound organization than such power without adequate supervision. Petty executives should never be entrusted with this vital function. Right relations cannot be secured by such a method. Hiring men and discharging men are serious affairs. Only big men can handle matters like these. Costly experience has settled this proposition. The human problem calls for its solution the best men and the most expert consideration.

The quality of the working force determines in the final analysis the quality of the organization, of its product, of its success. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in the organizations which sell service; for example, department stores and public service corporations. The point of contact between the business and the customers and the channel of communication are always through the individual employe. The business is summed up as to its standards by this outpost in the person of saleswoman, telephone operator, or car conductor. Good-will is made or unmade according to the type of representative. The larger the organization, the more the units of contact. Business may be essentially impersonal, but it is highly personal in its service features. The teamster,

driver, stenographer, floor manager, claim adjuster and scores of others act in a personal sense and with individual customers.

Who selects these people? On what basis are they selected? Is it all guess-work? Is it possible to standardize the work of selection? The business man who has not already asked himself questions such as these will do so before long. The whole drift of the time is in the direction of greater attention to the proper selection, supervision, and development of the individual worker. Such attention is no longer a by-product of other responsibilities. It is no longer an inferior man's job.

The employment function is so important to good organization as well as right relations that the hiring office must be looked upon hereafter as one of the vital departments of a business. Somewhere in the scheme of organization provision must be made for a well-equipped office to deal with the many problems concerning personnel. Only through such specialization can the solution be approached. In the first place, such office or department alone can deal with the task of scientifically organizing the source of supply of help. To depend on applicants at the gate, to hang out a want shingle or to advertise through want columns or the medium of other employes is too haphazard a method. Raw material is not procured in this way. Scientific purchasing requires a study of markets, testing out of material and figuring of conditions. There is here no higgling and blind bargaining. The laboratory is frequently used to render the final verdict in favor or against a certain purchase.

Why has the hiring of men been permitted to go on with less systematic scrutiny? One reason has been the surplus, the labor reserve. This will not long avail, first, because industrial conditions and legislation are working to diminish, if not wipe out, the excess of applicants for work on the fringe of every industry; and second, because wise business management recognizes the good sense of organizing the source of labor supply in connection with an organized labor market.

Source-organization assumes various forms. In the case of prospective executives, some large establishments employ "scouts" (not unlike those of major baseball leagues, who range the minor circuits for promising players), who visit periodically the colleges and other institutions and discover the men of promise. One of

the leading manufacturing companies of the country is noted for its post-graduate business opportunities. Indeed, it has built its entire executive force practically out of the findings of its scouts. Another establishment recruits its rank and file from a careful canvass, a block-by-block, and a house to house visitation of neighborhoods. One of the leading department stores in the East has made special arrangement with the high schools of its city and suburbs to send during Saturdays and vacation periods boys and girls for try-out work. They are fairly well paid during the probationary period. When they have finished their school work, positions are awaiting them, based on the observations and the records of the employment department which is charged with this duty.

A study of the source of supply, then, is the first interest of a properly organized employment office. Ample powers are given such offices to reach out and tap the best reservoirs. There is no reliance placed on securing a competitor's help. The aim of such offices is to develop its own material from the raw. Permanence of work is secured by the fact that fitness for the work required is carefully ascertained in advance. Discharge is not in the hands of a variety of sub-bosses. Whim and prejudice are eliminated. The employment office aims to secure employees who will find it worth while to stay.

To help in the proper appraisal of the employe's qualifications the office keeps complete records, reports, observations and other data. Each employe may consult the file belonging to him. His story is on file, impersonal as a barometer. But the most important record of all at the start, in the right sort of hiring office, is that which begins with the application blank.

As one studies the application cards of various concerns one reason for maladjustment becomes clear. So little analysis of the work required has been undertaken that we have practically no specifications, no *blueprints* of job-requirements in order to enable an applicant to measure himself against the actual demands. Hit-or-miss is the prevailing method. The hiring office properly managed knows that a well-devised application and record blank is one of its first tasks.

Some time ago the application blanks of fifty corporations were collected. If one cut off the firm names, there would be difficulty

in identifying from the material the nature of the business it pertained to. The blanks showed little understanding of the specific requirements of the various occupations. There was little differentiation in the questions asked. Employes cannot be properly selected on such a basis. Each establishment must work out its own needs and demands and record them in the hiring blank. No conventional forms will do, unless selection be wholly given up.

In brief, to one who observes the current practice of hiring and discharging employes, the conclusion comes home with peculiar force that in no other phase of management is there so much unintelligence, recklessness of cost and lack of imagination. On the other hand, in the right organization of the employment scheme there would seem to be endless possibilities of genuine service, a service not possible even in the most benevolent of welfare projects.

The situation on the whole suggests the need of recognizing a new profession in the organization of industry—the profession of hiring and developing men. Executives will have to be trained for this work as they are trained for other important responsibilities. The employment manager, the executive within whose duties falls the direction of the personnel, must be prepared for this work as for a genuine profession. The handling of men in this century will call for unusual preparation in the way of understanding and a spirit of justice.

To seek a professional basis for the work of handling men, and a definite training course of preparation is not a novel idea when one considers how many other tasks in business management have been brought under such direction. College schools of business training, and all engineering schools have had to do pioneer work in applying science and organized experience to familiar pursuits such as accounting, salesmanship, banking, railroad practice, and management. The Tuck School at Dartmouth College, and the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, to name two examples of forward-looking institutions of business training, have been simply true to the original motive of their foundation when they undertook to organize employment courses as proper subjects for instruction.

A long period of time may be needed before such courses contain standard and thoroughly valuable material, but until they do, they are still in a good position to gather the best available material,

analyze the best practice and systematize the thinking and research into the problem. In the meantime the management world is laid under obligation to these institutions for their pioneering spirit and their placing themselves in a position to make a contribution to what many now regard as the most important phase of management.

In the growth of employment management societies and in the closer connection between them and management training courses, both employer and employe may find valuable assistance in overcoming waste and in developing new possibilities of coöperation.

## THE WORK OF THE EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT OF DENNISON MANUFACTURING COMPANY, FRAMINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

BY PHILIP J. REILLY,  
Employment Manager.

The employment department of the Dennison Manufacturing Company was established on its present basis on January 1, 1914.

This department was expected to improve the human relationships and to reduce the labor turnover of the industry (a) by making a careful study of the requirements of its various occupations; (b) by engaging persons who could best meet those requirements and see that they were adequately instructed; (c) by transferring to other occupations any promising employes who were unadapted to the first job; and (d) by heedfully noting the reasons given by employes for quitting, so that steps could be taken to eradicate any common cause that was making employes dissatisfied and causing them to leave.

Although studies of other phases of employment work were of assistance, it was mainly through the careful study given to the foregoing divisions of placement work that the employment department was able in a large degree, to accomplish the expected results.

In the Dennison factory about 10 per cent of the force of 2,200 employes are engaged in the so-called skilled trades. This small group represents machinists, electricians, carpenters, compositors,